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FM USDEL FRANCE
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BT
S E C R E T USDEL FRANCE 1038

NODIS/PARIS MEETINGS

SUBJ: GVNDEL'S CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE US/GVN POLICY DIFFERENCES

1. SUMMARY: IN COURSE OF REGUALR CONSULTATIONS JANUARY 17, MINISTER OF GVNDEL PHONG SAID MEMBERS OF HIS DELEGATION HAD BEEN DISCUSSING AMONG THEMSELVES TWO ISSUES WHICH UNLESS CAREFULLY HANDLED THEY FEARED COULD LEAD TO POLICY DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN US AND GVN. THESE ISSUES WERE (A) VIETNAMIZATION AS ALTERNATIVE TO NEGOTIATIONS AND (B) MUTUAL WITHDRAWAL AS PART OF OVERALL SETTLEMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. PHONG SAID GVNDEL HAD NEVER ACCEPTED US CONCEPT THAT VIETNAMIZATION WAS ALTERNATIVE TO NEGOTIATION. GVNDEL'S STATEMENTS IN PARIS HAD CAREFULLY AVOIDED THIS FORMULATION. GVN CONSIDERED VIETNAMIZATION AS A POLICY BASED ON AND CONSISTENT WITH GVN'S RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENSE; THUS IT WAS NOT SUBJECT TO BARGINING. EVEN IF COMMUNISTS WERE TO BEGIN TO "NEGOTIATE," GVN WOULD NOT CONSIDER THAT VIETNAMIZATION SHOULD STOP AT THAT POINT OR EVEN THAT ITS CESSATION SHOULD PROPERLY BE AN ELEMENT OF NEGOTIATIONS. PHONG EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT IF OTHER SIDE WERE TO PRESS US ON VIETNAMIZATION AS ALTERNATIVE TO NEGOTIATIONS AND WERE TO MAKE SOME MOVE THAT COULD BE CONSTRUED AS A VALID NEGOTIATING INITIATIVE TAKING US UP ON THIS CONCEPT, SERIOUS DIVISION WOULD INSTANTLY ARISE BETWEEN GVN AND US. HE FURTHER EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN THAT COMMUNISTS MIGHT BE PLANNING SOMETHING ALONG THESE LINES.

3. SIMILAR SITUATION EXISTED WITH RESPECT TO MUTUAL WITHDRAWALS, PHONG SAID. GVN HAD ALWAYS SOUGHT TO

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OBSCURE THE DIMINISHING EMPHASIS ON THE PART OF US WITH RESPECT TO THE MUTUALITY OF WITHDRAWALS. ALTHOUGH "MUTUAL" DID NOT APPEAR IN OCTOBER 1970 PROPOSAL, PHONG SAID THIS NUANCE WAS PASSED OVER, AND GVN MAINTAINED POSITION THAT NVN TROOPS SHOULD WITHDRAW TO THE NORTH AS PART OF ANY OVERALL SETTLEMENT. PHONG ACKNOWLEDGED THAT AS US WITHDRAWALS CONTINUED TOWARD A RESIDUAL FORCE LEVEL, THE MUTUALITY ISSUE BECAME LESS RELEVANT, BUT HE NEVERTHELESS BELIEVED THAT GVN MIGHT SEEK TO HAVE MUTUALITY OF WITHDRAWAL PRINCIPLE APPLIED TO WHATEVER RESIDUAL US FORCES REMAINED BEFORE THEIR FINAL PULLOUT.

4. PHONG CONCLUDED THAT IT WOULD BE WELL TO GIVE THOUGHT TO HOW THESE POTENTIALLY DIVISIVE ISSUES COULD BE HANDLED SO THEY WOULD NOT BECOME SOURCE OF DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS IN COMING MONTHS. GP-3 PORTER
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